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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 000811

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/23/2024  
TAGS: PGOV PREL PINS I2  
SUBJECT: KRG & GOI PRIME MINISTERS AGREE TO RE-START  
DIALOGUE

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Classified By: PMIN Robert S. Ford for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: Kurdish Regional Government Prime Minister Nechirvan Barzani (Massoud's nephew) agreed with Prime Minister Maliki during their meeting in Baghdad on March 24 to reduce tensions between the central and Kurdish region governments. Barzani told us after that meeting that he and Maliki had agreed to (a) tone down media rhetoric, (b) arrange for a follow-on meeting between Maliki's Da'wa team and the Kurds in Kurdistan and (c) to establish their own line of communication. In our own meetings with the Prime Minister's advisors during the past two weeks they have offered few ideas on how to forge compromise with the Kurdish leadership on issues like disputed internal boundaries, oil and Kirkuk elections. The Maliki-Barzani meeting is a good first step but it is only that. End Summary.

KURDISH PRIME MINISTER MEETS IRAQI PRIME MINISTER

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¶2. (C) For the first time in nine months, Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) Prime Minister Nechirvan Barzani met with Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki, on March 24, in an effort to re-kindle a regional-central government dialogue and patch things up between Maliki and the Barzanis. Still smarting from recent rhetoric and troop movements in Kirkuk, Nechirvan was quick to point out in a debrief to Poloff after the meeting that it had been just an "ice breaker." Serious discussion will only take place after both sides have identified the issues and possible solutions. Based on his historical ties to Maliki during the resistance, Nechirvan agreed to be Maliki's KRG/Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) point of contact.

STEPS AGREED TO REDUCE TENSIONS - A START

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¶3. (C) Nechirvan told Poloff that both sides had agreed to stop the negative rhetoric in the press and only issue positive statements to set the tone for future Arab-Kurd cooperation. Maliki said he would contact Nechirvan when he had assembled a Da'wa delegation to travel to Erbil to meet with KRG leadership with specific agenda topics. (Comment: A previous attempt to send a Da'wa delegation north in February 2009 to meet with President Masoud Barzani was thwarted when the public rhetoric between Erbil and Baghdad grew too hot. End Comment.) KRG Minister of International Relations Falah Mustafa told Poloff on March 24 said that the outcome of this upcoming meeting will determine what mechanisms they will use to address outstanding issues (oil, Kirkuk, DIBs). According to Mustafa, Maliki was not opposed to resuming the Five Party Committee Talks but Maliki insisted that the Kurds take them seriously and attend all the meetings. Nechirvan agreed to travel more often to Baghdad. Nechirvan told Poloff that both he and Maliki

thought it best to bring KRG President Masoud Barzani into direct negotiations with Maliki only after preparations were made to guarantee a successful encounter. Maliki reportedly committed to making a trip North as well.

A POLITICAL ALLIANCE PROPOSAL ?

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14. (C) Nechirvan said that with national elections in mind, Maliki eagerly proposed that Da'wa and the Kurds form a political alliance and announce it publically. Nechirvan said he politely and cautiously backed away from the request. He smiled and said that he is initially suspicious of this request, believing that Maliki wants the Kurds to foreclose their alliances with other political entities. (Comment: Given the recent elevated tensions, such an offer is hard to imagine. If Maliki did in fact say it he may not have been very serious. End Comment.)

MALIKI ADVISORS BEFORE HAD TAKEN HARD LINE

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15. (C) Emboffs have called on Maliki chief of staff Tareq Abdullah Nejm, political advisor Sadeq Rikabi and Maliki confidante Sami al-Askeri several times each over the past two weeks to urge that the Prime Minister find a way to forge compromise with the Kurdish leadership. In general, they have offered few concrete ideas about how this could be done. We have raised with them issues such as the Article 23 group negotiating Kirkuk elections, the upcoming UNAMI disputed internal boundaries (DIBs) reports and three way local security talks involving the U.S., Baghdad government and the Kurdish regional government. Maliki's team has appeared either little informed or puzzled about how to move such issues forward. Instead they usually have fallen back on

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their legal interpretations of the Constitution that make out Masoud Barzani's deployments of Kurdish security as illegal, and they appear angry at the media rhetoric.

COMMENT

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16. (C) Maliki's advisors have been stuck on the notion that there is a fundamental difference in how Kurds and Arabs interpret the constitution and have not yet gone much farther. Therefore, the Maliki - Nechirvan meeting, if Nechirvan's account is to be believed, produced some unexpected positive agreements in terms of setting up a channel of communication that is sorely needed, an agreement to hold more face-to-face talks and halting the media attacks. We had heard from multiple contacts that the Prime Minister's office had been relying on the abrasive Mohamad Ihsan as his primary channel to the Kurdish Regional Government. Nechirvan could be a better channel. Of course, it remains to be seen if any of the steps agreed are taken; the distrust and misperceptions on both sides now are enormous. We will follow up with them in the coming days to urge that the Prime Minister build on this meeting's results and urge also that they start thinking more creatively about how to address issues like security, oil, disputed boundaries and Kirkuk elections.

BUTENIS